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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A Real American

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Abraham Lincoln

A Real American

by

Daniel W. Hoan

For twenty years Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee

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Abraham Lincoln

A Real American



No ruler of any nation was or is more beloved throughout the world than Abraham Lincoln. He was not only loved by every school child and by the humblest of American citizenry, but travelers tell us that his picture may be seen hanging even in the crude and weather-worn cabins of the peasants in far off lands.

Lincoln was not only the dominating figure of the grave crisis through which he passed, but an example of manhood, simple justice and human kindness which is an inspiration today to the childhood and common citizenry everywhere.

Why this great awe and love for Lincoln? It was because in his daily and official life he was the very embodiment and exemplification of human kindness, justice and brotherhood.

Lincoln the commoner.

Lincoln by origin, manner of dress, method of reasoning and in actual practice was a commoner. His very soul rebelled against the greed, selfishness and downright impudence of the aristocracy of his day. When as a young man he visited New Orleans and witnessed for the first time with his own eyes the sale of human beings on the auction block,



DANIEL W. HOAN

Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee

he turned away in the utmost disgust, remarking in substance to his companions, "If ever I have the chance to hit this thing I shall give it a crushing blow." Surely the blow he gave to this institution of slavery, the illegitimate child of our early aristocracy, was a mighty one.

It is a little known fact that, when a very young man, Abraham Lincoln journeyed a long distance on foot to visit and read the books in the library of the co-operative colony in New Harmony, Indiana, established by Robert Owen. Robert Owen had championed the rights of the workers and for his offense had been driven out of England. The influence of this man and his doctrine of social justice had spread far in the middle west. No doubt the tall backwoodsman had heard of Owen's ideas and found them near enough to his own to warrant further study.

That Abraham Lincoln was in every fiber of his heart a commoner was evidenced by the sentiments he proclaimed to the German immigrants of Cincinnati after his election to the presidency. At that time there was no dearth of speculators who lobbied for grants of large tracts of public lands so they might the easier exploit the early settlers. In pronouncing himself in favor of cutting up these lands into small parcels, so that every poor man of his time might have a home, he gave utterance to the following lofty ideal:

"It is not my nature, when I see a people borne down by the weight of their shackles—the oppression of tyranny—to make their life more bitter by heaping upon them greater burdens; but rather would I do all in my power to raise the yoke than to add anything that would tend to crush them." (Vol. IV, P. 120, Complete Works of Lincoln, Nicolay & Hay.)

Champion of the workers.

President Lincoln not only entertained a profound bond of sympathy for the struggling toilers but may be charged with being a propagandist in their behalf. In his famous reply to a committee of the Workingmen's Association of

New York about one year before his tragic death, he reiterated what he had often said before, namely, "Labor is prior to, and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed."

This honored president even went so far in that communication as to intimately advise the workers to unite not only nationally but internationally for their own mutual interest and protection. Here are Lincoln's exact words:

"Let the workers beware of prejudices, working division and hostility among themselves. The most notable feature of a disturbance in your city (New York) last summer was the hanging of some working people by other working people. It should never be so. The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations, and tongues, and kindreds." (P. 53, Vol. X, Nicolay & Hay.)

Slavery and the class struggle.

In the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln made it clear that he considered the fight against slavery part of the world wide struggle of the down-trodden masses for freedom and justice. Referring to this struggle he said:

"That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, 'You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it.' No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle." (P. 148, The Voice of Lincoln, Wanamaker.)

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions made in the struggle for universal free education, mainly sponsored by the labor unions, was Lincoln's attack on the so-called "mud-sill" theory in his address on agriculture delivered at Milwaukee at the State Fair on Sept. 30, 1859, as follows:

"By the 'mud-sill' theory it is assumed that labor and education are incompatible, and any practical combination of them impossible. According to that theory, a blind horse upon a tread-mill is a perfect illustration of what a laborer should be—all the better for being blind, that he could not kick understandingly. According to that theory, the education of laborers is not only useless but pernicious and dangerous. In fact, it is, in some sort, deemed a misfortune that laborers should have heads at all. Those same heads are regarded as explosive materials, only to be safely kept in damp places, as far as possible from that peculiar sort of fire which ignites them. A Yankee who could invent a strong-handed man without a head would receive the everlasting gratitude of the 'mud-sill' advocates." (P. 251, vol. V, Complete Works of Lincoln, Nicolay & Hay.)

The doctrine of equality.

Lincoln made a thorough study of the ideas of equality held by the founding fathers, in order to prove that slavery was incompatible with their highest ideals. In 1857 Senator Douglas explained the statement in The Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" by saying that it meant only that British subjects on this continent were equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain. Lincoln challenged that statement in these ringing words:

"I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men; but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say that all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men equal—equal in certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This they said and this they meant."

If Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln was its greatest interpreter. Describing further what our fathers meant by the phrase, "All men are created equal," he said:

"They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet that they were about to confer it upon them. In fact they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and, even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere." (P. 206-7, Voice of Lincoln, Wamanaker.)

A Living Americanism.

In brief, Lincoln's definition of Americanism was not blind worship of archaic symbols and meaningless repetition of patriotic phrases; rather it was active participation in the struggle to bring the fine ideals of our ancestors out of the realm of dreams and make them into sober reality.

This philosophy of Americanism of Lincoln's was made a part of his famous Gettysburg speech in his concluding words which will live forever in our hearts:

"It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Lincoln made what I consider his greatest contribution toward solving our economic difficulties, in his speech on the significance of labor, delivered in 1847. He was discussing the tariff problem, but his analysis of the rights and privileges of workers was profound and applies to all his economic thinking.

Labor makes all wealth.

Here are Lincoln's own words:

"In the early days of our race the Almighty said to the first of our race, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread;' and since then, if we except the light and the air of heaven, no good thing has been or can be enjoyed by us without having first cost labor. And inasmuch as most good things are produced by labor it follows that all such things of right belong to those whose labor has produced them.

"But it has so happened, in all ages of the world, that some have labored, and others have without labor enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To secure to each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a worthy object of any good government.

"But then a question arises,—how can a government best effect this? In our own country, in its present condition, will the protective principle advance or retard this object? Upon this subject the habits of our whole species fall into three great classes—useful labor, useless labor, and idleness. Of these the first only is meritorious, and to it all the products of labor rightfully belong; but the two latter, while they exist, are heavy pensioners upon the first, robbing it of a large portion of its just rights. The only remedy for this is to, so far as possible, drive useless labor and idleness out of existence." (P. 307, vol. 1, Complete Works of Lincoln by Nicolay & Hay.)

Lincoln and Marx.

Being a master of logic, his innermost thoughts must have been as follows: Believing as I do that every useful laborer is entitled to all he produces, I cannot subscribe to any system that permits one man to extract a part of such product for such labor by levying a profit upon him. Lincoln carried on considerable correspondence with Karl Marx. Whether he was influenced by Marx's ideas, or reached the same conclusion from his own reasoning, we cannot tell. We can only note with respect that he was far in advance of his time in his grasp of fundamental economic principles. Had he lived to understand that only through Socialism can profit be eliminated, he would unquestionably have enlisted with those who are dedicated to its realization.

Thirty years after Lincoln's death a young man came out of Indiana who carried Lincoln's ideas forward to their logical conclusion. Eugene V. Debs, himself one of those workingmen whom Lincoln honored, had a career in many respects parallel to that of our greatest president.

Like Lincoln, Debs was born of humble parentage, in a small town in the middle west. He educated himself by his own hard work, and although his great gifts enabled him to rise to a high place in the estimation of his fellows, he never abandoned the class from which he came.

Debs shared Lincoln's great all-embracing love of humanity, and like him, he believed that he could best express that love and forward his ideals through politics, through a new political party formed for that particular purpose. Old party lines had lost their meaning in 1896, as in 1856, and the time was ripe for new ones.

Debs faces a new era.

The great difference between them was that Lincoln was active during the early years of the industrial revolu-

tion, while Debs came to manhood when the industrial revolution was almost accomplished. It was clear by that time that uncontrolled capitalism was not the boon to mankind that might have been expected a generation earlier. The final distribution of the free lands in 1896 brought an end to the era of agricultural expansion, and left the workers in the role of wage slaves, with no alternative between accepting the work offered them or starving without it.

Debs dedicated his life to the work that Lincoln began. He believed, with the martyr president, that "To secure to every laborer the whole product of his labor . . . is a worthy object of any good government." For thirty years he worked through the unions and the Socialist party to attain this end.

The cause to which these two great men devoted their lives was never more urgent than today. The theories which they expounded, unpopular in their own times, grow ever more apparent as the obvious and essential way out of our economic wilderness.

Our generation is confronted with the tremendous task of reorganizing society so as to distribute to the workers the goods they produce. Every year since Lincoln's time the workers have received a smaller share of the product of industry, though the total product has greatly increased. Of course this cannot go on indefinitely, since someone must consume the goods that are turned out.

If all of those who produce could be paid for their services the equivalent of all they produced, they would be able to buy with these increased earnings all that they produced. This would immediately start the wheels of industry in motion and furnish a market to the farmers for their products.

Capitalism depends on markets.

Let us approach this problem from a different angle. The entire economic system called Capitalism is dependent for its very existence upon markets. That is to say, a place

to sell goods. Markets may be divided into those found in foreign countries and those found at home. The total of these foreign markets has always been greatly exaggerated. Never at the highest peak of prosperity has the total amount of foreign shipments exceeded an annual aggregate of more than 7 per cent of our entire output. While the total of these foreign shipments are small in comparison to the market at home, yet they aggregate hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars. It is sufficient to cause intense commercial rivalry between the exploiters of various nations. It is the direct incentive for large armaments which finally leads to war, costly in human lives and money, yet it is very plain that the market for the sale of the bulk of our products must be developed within the borders of the United States.

How is this to be done? The upper crust cannot consume more products regardless of how much money they have. Rockefeller may purchase a hundred suits of clothes, but he cannot wear more than one at a time. A man may own four or five mansions and yet he cannot occupy more than one at a time. It follows that the only place that we can increase markets is among the 80 per cent or 90 per cent of our people who have an annual return way below \$2,000 a year.

Producers must consume.

This includes the great human mass of producers: these that Lincoln included in the term "laborers." They are the people whose dire poverty is the direct cause of the deterioration of their physical and mental well-being. It is they whose moral fiber is being degenerated by being forced to live on a pitiful dole which is handed them in the relief lines. It is this great group of people who, because of their pitifully small earnings when they do work, are unable to buy the vast surplus wealth which their labor produces. Through our capitalist profit system the few grow richer and the many are reduced to poverty.

We now learn that the entire economic structure is being crushed by the huge surplus of untold wealth which the hungry laborers cannot buy. What is worse, because of the constant improvement in machinery and methods of production our surplus goods increase while the bread lines and numbers of unemployed grow larger.

All over the world the same thing is happening: Millions of men are out of work, but the men at work can turn out just as much goods—and in many cases more—with the aid of machines. Armies of unemployed are growing, but despite the decline in employment, there is no decrease of stored-up raw materials, foodstuffs and finished goods. And the crazy capitalists keep prodding the government into turning over more money to productive enterprises, instead of to consumptive channels.”

Why should we starve?

Shall we continue to pile up these enormous surpluses? Shall we, without protest, face starvation in the midst of plenty? Shall we follow the Roosevelt theory of destroying in part these surpluses so as to increase prices and thus further diminish the amount of such goods that labor can purchase?

Or shall we think in terms of how the philosophy of Lincoln may be put into actual operation, how to give to each laborer the full product of his toil, so that surpluses can be purchased and the increased wealth used steadily to improve the conditions of those who work?

There is no way to secure to labor the full product of its toil so long as one person is allowed to make a profit at the expense of another. The only known plan by which the wealth produced by labor can be returned to it is through the establishment of a new economic order, namely, Socialism. Through this plan the railroads, mills, mines, factories, banks and all the gigantic means of production, distribution

and communication would be owned by the people instead of by a few profiteers. Just as the post office, postal savings banks, Muscle Shoals, power project, schools, parks, highways, public libraries, playgrounds, public health departments and other facilities are operated for service and the improvement of the lives of our people, instead of for the enrichment of the few, so should all the means of production be used to advance civilization and not to fatten the pocket-books of a few.

Capitalism's day is done.

There was a time when private ownership of business worked fairly well. It was at a time years ago when shops were small and chains, monopolies and trusts did not exist. Today, through the control of banks and the nation's credit and natural resources we are told by the greatest authorities on the subject that 166 key men control the dominant portion of the nation's entire industries. Senator Norris has pointed out that these 166 men are in turn under the dominion and control of five large banks in the City of New York.

This, then, is the picture. Private ownership spells the ownership of virtually this entire nation by a very few men who through the control of industry and the nation's credit are waxing fat. By private ownership these economic kings are extracting from the pocketbooks of labor the products of its toil. As a result we now find in this, the wealthiest nation in the world, one person in six out of employment, suffering insecurity and want.

The Socialist plan.

In contrast to this, let us look at the program which the Socialists propose. In the Scandinavian countries, where hard times visited long before they arrived in the United

States, the workers rallied to the support of the Socialist party. There we find that after many years of effort, the problems which exist everywhere else are being solved one after the other. Even the capitalist papers are now forced to give credit to the remarkable progress being made in those countries on behalf of the toilers.

The Scandinavian countries have not been afraid to take the profit motive out of industry. Through co-operative production and distribution, through government and municipal ownership and operation of utilities and industries, they have brought peace and prosperity to countries poor in natural resources. Their Trade union and Socialist movements are strong.

These are the essential steps to achieve ultimate socialization. If the Scandinavian countries can do it, we can do as well. The workers and farmers of the United States have been kept in bondage because they have failed to learn the lesson of unity and solidarity.

For seventy-five years the political leadership of the country has rested in hands of those less wise, less just, less interested in the welfare of the people than Lincoln and Debs. These misleaders have fooled the workers into believing in their false promises of prosperity, and have kept the workers from uniting in a solid bloc to form a party of their own, which would include and represent the interests of all workers in factory, field or office.

Forward to Socialism.

But the time has come now when they will not be fooled much longer. Workers cannot afford to split their votes between two anti-working class parties. They are coming at last to the realization that they need a party which will fight against both Republicans and Democrats, rejecting the policies of the New Deal and the old deal, and inaugurating a new era of production for use that will take the grumbling element out of their lives altogether.

In Socialism lies the only hope of the workers. Lincoln wasn't afraid of it, Debs gloried in it. But some American workers feel that it is a strange foreign word. If they would rather have it under another name, through a Farmer-Labor Party or something else of the sort, that's all right too. The main thing is that the ideas of Marx, Lincoln and Debs are the only ideas that offer hope to the American workers.

"The immortal message of Karl Marx is being reiterated throughout the length and breadth of the land: "WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS! YOU HAVE A WORLD TO GAIN!" Let us cease to lend our ears to false prophets and unite under this slogan to achieve the goal set for us by Abraham Lincoln: "It is a worthy object of any good government to see that every laborer receives the full product of his toil."

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